

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5724

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

USUN NEW YORK 613

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR,PDIP,MV,US

SUBJECT: VISIT TO MALDIVES: PRESENTATION OF CREDENTIALS

REF COLOMBO 3251

1. SUMMARY: AMBASSADOR REED TRAVELED TO MALE AUGUST 22-24
IN ORDER TO PRESENT HIS CREDENTIALS TO THE MALDIVIAN
PRESIDENT, IBRAHIM NASIR. DURING HIS STAY HE HELD
DISCUSSIONS WITH OTHER MALDIVIAN GOVERNMENT (GOM)
OFFICIALS ON VARIOUS MATTERS. A RECENTLY-ARRIVED
AMERICAN UNESCO EXPERT CONFIRMED THAT THERE ARE AREAS IN
EXPANSION PLAN FOR MALDIVIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM WHERE
U.S. EXPANSION PLAN FOR MALDIVIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM WHERE
U.S. ASSISTANCE WOULD NOT DUPLICATE UN EFFORTS AND THIS
AID WOULD BE MOST WELCOME. A FORMAL OFFER FROM U.S. G.
WAS SOLICITED. THE MALDIVIAN ECONOMY APPEARS TO BE ON
THE UPSWING WITH THE FISHING, SHIPPING AND TOURIST
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INDUSTRIES ALL DOING WELL WITH THE FIRST TWO EXPANDING
RAPIDLY. THE GOM IS EXPANDING ITS CONTACTS WITH AND

MEMBERSHIP IN MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS, PARTICULARLY UN, INTERNATIONAL FINANCING AND ARABIC DEVELOPMENT FUNDS. THE PURPOSE IS TO TAP MULTILATERAL ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE. GOM DEFINITELY PLANS TO REESTABLISH PERMANENT MISSION TO UN AND WE SAID USUN WOULD ASSIST WITH SETTLING IN TO EXTENT POSSIBLE. THERE WAS LITTLE COMMENT ON THE MALDIVES' RECENT AND SUDDEN ELECTION AS FULL MEMBER OF NON-ALGINED. PRESIDENT NASIR CONTINUES TO MAINTAIN FULL CONTROL. FOREIGN RELATIONS ARE ON AN EVEN KEEL. MALDIVIANS CONTINUE TO PURSUE THEIR GOAL OF MEASURED NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT WITH DETERMINATION AND SELF-RELIANCE. END SUMMARY.

2. IN A SIMPLE CEREMONY AUGUST 23 MORNING, AMBASSADOR REED PRESENTED HIS CREDENTIALS TO THE MALDIVIAN PRESIDENT, IBRAHIM NASIR. AT HIS REQUEST, THERE WERE NO FORMAL STATEMENTS AND THE CEREMONY MERELY CONSISTED OF HANDING OVER THE LETTER OF RECALL OF AMBASSADOR VAN HOLLEN AND THE LETTER OF CREDENCE FOR AMBASSADOR REED TO THE PRESIDENT. ALSO AT THE PRESIDENT'S REQUEST, NO OTHER AMERICAN OFFICIALS WERE PRESENT. THERE FOLLOWED A CORDIAL CONVERSATION THROUGH AN INTERPRETER WHICH LASTED ABOUT 20 MINUTES. (REFTEL).

3. IN ADDITION TO THE CONVERSATION WITH THE PRESIDENT, THE AMBASSADOR ALSO CALLED ON VICE PRESIDENT AND HEAD OF FISHERIES AHMED HILMY DIDI, VICE PRESIDENT AND HEAD OF FINANCE ABDUL SATTAR, DEPUTY TO THE HEAD, DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, FATHULLA JAMEEL, AND THE UNDER SECRETARY OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, ZAHIR HUSSAIN. VICE PRESIDENT FOR TRADE AND COMMERCE, ALI MANIKU, WAS OUT OF THE COUNTRY AS USUAL. THE AMBASSADOR ALSO HOSTED A DINNER FOR MALDIVIAN OFFICIALS WHICH WAS ATTENDED BY THE TWO VICE PRESIDENTS MENTIONED ABOVE, THE MINISTERS OF HEALTH AND JUSTICE, THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL, AND VARIOUS OTHER MALDIVIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WHO BRAVED A RAINY NIGHT AND STORMY SEAS

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TO REACH VILINGILI ISLAND WHERE THE DINNER WAS HELD. ITEMS OF INTEREST WHICH CAME OUT OF THE TALKS WITH THESE VARIOUS OFFICIALS ARE GIVEN BELOW:

4. AID TO MALDIVIAN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS: DURING THE CONVERSATION WITH THE EDUCATION MINISTRY UNDER SECRETARY WE WERE JOINED BY DR. JEFF HUNTINGTON, AN AMERICAN WHO, WITH HIS WIFE, HAD RECENTLY ARRIVED IN MALE TO TAKE A POSITION AS THE UNESCO ADVISOR TO THE MALDIVIAN GOVERNMENT (GOM) ON EDUCATIONAL

MATTERS. THE UNDER SECRETARY DESCRIBED THE GOM'S EFFORTS TO UPGRADE THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM INCLUDING UPGRADING THE ATOLL SCHOOLS, TRAINING OF TEACHERS FOR THESE SCHOOLS, ADDING TWO YEARS TO THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM TO BRING IT UP TO THE BRITISH GENERAL CAMBRIDGE CERTIFICATE "A" LEVEL AND ADDING CURRICULA IN HOME SCIENCE AND COMMERCE AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL. WE MENTIONED THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT WAS PREPARED TO OFFER LIMITED ASSISTANCE TO THE EFFORT TO UPGRADE THE MALDIVIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM (STATE 16877), PROVIDING IT WOULD NOT DUPLICATE OR CONFLICT WITH THE UN OR ANY OTHER EFFORT. DR. HUNTINGTON INDICATED THAT THERE ARE AT LEAST THREE AREAS IN WHICH A U.S. CONTRIBUTION WOULD BE MOST WELCOME AND WOULD NOT DUPLICATE OTHER EFFORTS. THE UNDER SECRETARY SUGGESTED THAT THE NEXT STEP WOULD BE FOR THE EMBASSY TO WRITE FORMALLY TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS WITH THE DETAILS OF THE OFFER TO USG ASSISTANCE SO THAT FURTHER ACTION COULD BE INITIATED.

5. ECONOMIC MATTERS: IN GENERAL, THE MALDIVES SEEMS TO HAVE RECOVERED FROM THE ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES IT FACED FROM 1973 TO 1975 BECAUSE OF A POOR FISHING CATCH AND INFLATION IN THE WORLD MARKET. WE WERE TOLD THAT THE SHIPPING LINE IS DOING "VERY WELL INDEED". TWO TANKERS HAD RECENTLY BEEN ADDED TO THE FLEET BRINGING ITS NUMBERS UP TO 62 AND THE TONNAGE TO OVER 200,000 TONS. THE TANKERS WILL BE USED TO TRANSPORT PETROLEUM PRODUCTS TO THE MALDIVES, HOPEFULLY FROM SOURCES WHICH ARE CHEAPER

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THAN THE PRICES THE GOM IS CURRENTLY PAYING TO THE CEYLON PETROLEUM CORPORATION WHICH MALDIVIAN OFFICIALS DESCRIBE AS VERY HIGH.

6. FISHING INDUSTRY: OUR TALKS INDICATED THAT THE FISHING INDUSTRY IS DEVELOPING RATHER DRAMATICALLY. THIS REMAINS THE BACKBONE OF THE ECONOMY AND WE WERE TOLD 80 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION IS ENGAGED IN FISHING. THE PROGRAM TO MOTORIZE SUITABLE FISHING VESSELS HAS NOW CAUGHT ON AFTER A SLOW START CAUSED BY THE CONSERVATISM OF THE FISHERMEN. AFTER STRENUEOUS GOM EFFORTS, AND ASSISTANCE FROM THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT IN THE FORM OF 100 DONATED ENGINES AND REPAIR AND TRAINING FACILITIES PROVIDED BY THE JAPANESE FIRM WHICH MANUFACTURES THE ENGINES, THE DEMAND FOR MOTORIZATION FAR EXCEEDS THE GOM'S CAPACITY TO MEET IT. WE WERE INFORMED THAT THERE ARE PRESENTLY 3000 PERSONS SIGNED UP TO MOTORIZE

THEIR VESSELS ALTHOUGH ONLY TWO BOATS CAN BE MOTORIZED PER DAY GIVING ABOUT A FOUR-YEAR BACKLOG. THE GOM PROVIDES LOANS TO THE FISHERMEN TO COVER THE COST OF MOTORIZATION WHICH ARE REPAYABLE IN 7 YEARS. WE WERE ALSO TOLD THAT THE CATCH OF MOTORIZED BOATS IS FIVE TIMES MORE THAN THAT OF THE TRADITIONAL SAIL-DRIVEN CFAFT. THE AGREEMENT WITH THE JAPANESE MARUBENI CORPORATION TO PURCHASE FRESH FISH IN THE NORTHERN ATOLLS IS WORKING WELL ALTHOUGH THE MALDIVIANS FEEL THE PRICE THEY ARE GETTING, \$300 PER TON FOR TUNA, IS TOO LOW COMPARED TO WORLD MARKET PRICES. THEY ARE SELLING AN AVERAGE OF 500

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INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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TONS OF FISH PER MONTH WHICH PROVIDES CONSIDERABLE INCOME BY MALDIVIAN STANDARDS. THE LATER AGREEMENT FOR THE SOUTHERN ATOLLS WITH THE ICJ CORPORATION OF BANGKOK (WHICH HAS TWO AMERICAN FIRMS AND A KOREAN FIRM AS PARTNERS) HAS NOT DONE SO WELL SO FAR. THE MALDIVIANS COMPLAINED THAT THE KOREANS, WHO ARE PRO-

VIDING THE COLLECTION VESSELS, HAD SO FAR ONLY PUT THREE SUCH SHIPS INTO OPERATION WHEN EIGHTEEN WERE SPECIFIED IN THE AGREEMENT. AS A RESULT, SALES OF FISH IN THE SOUTHERN ATOLLS HAS BEEN MUCH LESS THAN THE GOM HAD EXPECTED. OFFICIALS FELT, HOWEVER, THAT THESE PROBLEMS WILL BE STRAIGHTENED OUT. PLANS TO SET UP A FISH CANNING FACTORY IN LAVYANI ATOLL ARE PROCEEDING, WITH INDIAN ASSISTANCE, AND THE GOM EXPECTS IT MAY START OPERATION SOMETIME IN 1977.

7. FINANCE: THE VICE PRESIDENT IN CHARGE OF FINANCE CONFIRMED THAT THE GOM IS PROCEEDING WITH

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ITS APPLICATIONS TO JOIN THE IMF, IBRD, IDA AND ADB INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS. IT HAS ALSO JOINED ESCAP WHICH HAS REPORTEDLY AGREED TO ASSIST IN A NATIONAL CENSUS ABETTED BY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE UNFPA. THE CENSUS TAKING IS SCHEDULED FOR DECEMBER 1977. HE INDICATED THAT THE MALDIVIANS FEEL THEY ARE NOT RECEIVING ANY BENEFIT FROM INTERNATIONAL MEASURES TO ALLEVIATE THE PLIGHT OF POOR COUNTRIES EVEN THOUGH THEY CONSIDER THEMSELVES, QUITE RIGHTLY, AMONG THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES. HE HOPES THAT MEMBERSHIP IN THESE ORGANIZATIONS WILL GIVE THE MALDIVES A BETTER CHANCE TO CLAIM THEIR SHARE OF MULTILATERAL ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE. THE VICE PRESIDENT ALSO CONFIRMED THAT THE GOM HAS CHANGED ITS POLICY REGARDING THE NON-ACCEPTANCE OF LOANS FROM FOREIGN COUNTRIES. IN THIS REGARD, THE GOM HAS BEEN GRANTED A LOAN BY THE KUWAIT FUND FOR ARAB ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF OVER \$5 MILLION FOR EXPANSION OF HULULE AIRPORT RUNWAY AND TERMINAL FACILITIES. THEY HOPE TO LENGTHEN THE RUNWAY TO COVER 9,000 FEET. WORK HAS BEEN STARTED ON RECLAIMING LAND IN THE LAGOON NORTH OF HULULE ISLAND AND ACTUAL CONSTRUCTION SHOULD BEGIN BY NEXT SPRING. WE WERE TOLD FOUR FIRMS, FROM THE U.K., AUSTRALIA, THE NETHERLANDS AND WEST GERMANY, HAD SUBMITTED BIDS BUT THAT THE TENDER HAS NOT YET BEEN AWARDED. ALSO MENTIONED WAS THE FACT THAT ABU DHABI IS PROVIDING THE MONEY TO FINANCE THE EARTH SATELLITE STATION IN MALE WHICH A JAPANESE FIRM IS CONSTRUCTING.

8. UNITED NATIONS: IN TALKS WITH DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OFFICIALS THEY CONFIRMED THAT THE DECISION TO REOPEN THE MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS ON A PERMANENT BASIS IS DEFINITE. THE DECISION REGARDING WHO WILL BE SENT TO NEW YORK HAS

NOT YET BEEN ANNOUNCED, HOWEVER, BUT WORD WAS EXPECTED SOMETIME THE WEEK OF AUGUST 30. WE ASKED THAT THEY LET US KNOW WHAT THE TRAVEL PLANS OF THE DELEGATION ARE SO THAT WE COULD ALERT USUN TO THEIR COMING. WE SAID WE WERE SURE USUN WOULD HELP THE

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MALDIVIAN DELEGATION IN SETTLING IN TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE.

9. FOREIGN RELATIONS: THE MALDIVES' ENTRY INTO THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT ELICITED LITTLE COMMENT FROM OFFICIALS WHICH MAY INDICATE THE MALDIVIANS WERE AS SURPRISED AS EVERYONE ELSE AT THEIR SUDDEN ELEVATION TO FULL MEMBERSHIP STATUS. WE SUSPECT THAT THEY MERELY WENT ALONG WITH THE LIBYANS ON THIS ONE AND TOOK LITTLE IF ANY INITIATIVE TO OBTAIN MEMBERSHIP THEMSELVES. REGIONALLY, DEPUTY HEAD OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS JAMEEL SAID RELATIONS WITH INDIA ARE VERY GOOD AND THAT THE INDIANS ARE BING HELPFUL BY PROVIDING ASSISTANCE IN THE CANNING FACTORY, EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES IN INDIA FOR MALDIVIAN STUDENTS AND BY PROVIDING A FEW INDIANS TEACHERS FOR THE MALE SECONDARY SCHOOLS. RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN ARE GOOD AND THE GOP HAS PROVIDED A HEADMASTER FOR THE BOYS SCHOOL IN MALE. RELATIONS WITH SRI LANKA ARE "IMPROVING" AFTER PASSING THROUGH A PERIDO OF SOME STRAIN. JAMEEL SAID THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE ARABIC COUNTRIES HAD INCREASED CONSIDERABLY SINCE THE MALDIVES JOINED THE ISLAMIC FOREIGN MINISTERS CONFERENCE LAST YEAR. HE DESCRIBED RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES AS GOOD BUT NOTED THERE WAS NOT MUCH INTERACTION BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES.

10. SUMMARY. PRESIDENT NASIR CONTINUES TO RULE HIS COUNTRY WITH A SHARP EYE AND A FIRM HAND. THERE APPEARED TO BE NO CHALLENGE TO HIS AUTHORITY. THE ECONOMY SEEMED DEFINITELY ON THE UPSWING AS A RESULT OF THE HARD WORK AND DETERMINATION OF THE MALDIVIANS THEMSELVES. HOWEVER, MATTERS ARE BECOMING MORE COMPLEX AS THE GOM IS FORCED TO RESORT TO FOREIGN FINANCING IN ORDER TO PROCEED WITH MORE COMPLEX INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS FOR DEVELOPING

TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS. FOREIGNERS ARE ALSO NOW INVOLVED IN THE FISHING INDUSTRY AND IN THE AVIATION FIELDS. THE MALDIVIANS SEEM LIKELY TO

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CONTINUE TO WELCOME, SUSPICIOUSLY, FOREIGN EXPERTISE
AND ASSISTANCE AS TRAINED MANPOWER REMAINS THE MOST
SERIOUS DRAWBACK TO THEIR DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS. BUT
THE EMPHASIS ON SELF-RELIANCE AND HARDHEADED
PRAGMATISM CERTAINLY SEEMS LIKELY TO REMAIN.

11. WE WILL PROVIDE OUR POLICY ASSESSMENT AND
RECOMMENDATIONS IN A SEPARATE MESSAGE.

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